ESSAY

ON

FALSTAFF, &c.

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ESSAYS

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF,

AND

ON HIS IMITATION

OF

FEMALE CHARACTERS.

To which are added,

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE.

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ESSAY

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.

MY intention in the following diſcourſe, is to explain and account for the pleaſure we receive from the repreſentation of Shakeſpeare's dramatic character of Sir John Falſtaff. In treating this ſubject, I ſhall with as much brevity as poſſible mention the cauſe on which our pleaſure depends; and then by a particular analyſis of the character endeavour to eſtabliſh my theory.

PART I.

No external object affects us in a more diſagreeable manner, than the view of ſuffer-

ing occasioned by cruelty; our uneasiness arises not only from the display of calamity, but from the display of an inhuman mind. For how much soever human nature may exhibit interesting appearances, there are dispositions in mankind, which cannot otherwise be regarded than with abhorrence. Of this sort are cruelty, malice, and revenge. They affect us in the representation in the same manner as in real life. Neither the poet nor historian, if they represent them unmixed and unconnected with other ingredients, can ever render them agreeable. Who can without pain peruse the tragedy of Titus Andronicus, or the account given by Suetonius of the butcheries and enormities perpetrated by some of the Cæsars?

Yet with cruelty, malice, and revenge, many useful and even excellent qualities may be blended; of this kind are courage, independence of spirit, discernment of character, sagacity in the contrivance, and dexterity

terity in the execution, of arduous enterprises. These, considered apart, and unconnected with moral or immoral affections, are viewed with considerable pleasure, and regarded with some respect. United with good dispositions, they produce the highest merit, and form the most exalted character. United with evil affections, though they do not lessen, yet perhaps they counteract; at least they alter the nature and tendency of our abhorrence. We do not indeed, on their account, regard the inhuman character with less disapprobation; on the contrary, our disapprobation is, if possible, more determined. Yet, by the mixture of different ingredients, our sensations are changed; they are not very painful; nay, if the proportion of respectable qualities be considerable, they become agreeable. The character, though highly blameable, attracts our notice, excites curiosity, and yields delight. The character of Satan in Paradise Lost, one of the most finished in the whole range

of epic poetry, fully illuſtrates our obſerva-tion: it diſplays, inhumanity, malice, and revenge, united with ſagacity, intrepidity, dexterity, and perſeverance. Of a ſimilar kind, though with ſome different lineaments, is Shakeſpeare's King Richard the Third; it excites indignation: indignation, however, is not a painful, but rather an agreeable feeling; a feeling too, which, if duly governed, we do not blame ourſelves for indulging.

We are led imperceptibly, almoſt by every, and even by oppoſite bonds of aſſociation, by thoſe of contraſt and reſemblance, to extend theſe remarks. There are qualities in human nature that excite abhorrence; and qualities alſo that excite diſguſt. We ſee ſome diſpoſitions that are enormouſly, and ſome that are meanly, ſhocking. Some give us pain by their atrocity, and ſome by their baſeneſs. As virtuous actions may be divided into thoſe that are reſpectable, and thoſe that are amiable; ſo of vicious actions,

ſome

ſome are hateful, and affect us with horror; others are vile, and produce averſion. By one claſs, we have an imaginary, ſympathetic, and tranſient apprehenſion of being hurt; by the other, we have a ſimilar apprehenſion of being polluted. We would chaſtiſe the one with painful, and the other with ſhameful puniſhment. Of the latter ſort are the groſs exceſſes and perverſion of inferior appetites. They hardly bear to be named; and ſcarcely, by any repreſentation, without judicious circumlocution, and happy adjuncts, can be rendered agreeable. Who can mention, without reluctance, the mere glutton, the mere epicure, and the ſot? And to theſe may be added the coward, the liar, the ſelfiſh and aſſenting paraſite.

Yet the conſtituent parts of ſuch characters may be ſo blended with other qualities of an agreeable, but neutral kind, as not only to loſe their diſguſtful, but to gain an engaging aſpect. They may be united

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with a complaiſance that has no aſperity but that falls in readily, or without apparent conſtraint, with every opinion or inclination. They may be united with good-humour, as oppoſed to moroſeneſs, and ſtarſhneſs of oppoſition: with ingenuity and verſatility, in the arts of deceit: and with faculties for genuine or even ſpurious wit; for the ſpurious requires ſome ability, and may, to ſome minds, afford amuſement. Add to this, that in fully explaining the appearance, in explaining how the mixture of different mental qualities, in the ſame character, affords delight; we muſt recollect, as on ſimilar occaſions, that when different and even oppoſite feelings encounter one another, and affect us at the ſame time; thoſe that prevail, under the guidance of ſome vigorous paſſion, carry the reſt along with them; direct them ſo as to receive the ſame tendency with themſelves, and impelling the mind in the ſame manner, receive from their coincidence addi-

tional

tional power *. They reſemble the ſwell and progreſs of a Tartar army. One horde meets with another; they fight; the vanquiſhed unite with the victors: incorporated with them, under the direction of a Timour or a Zingis, they augment their force, and enable them to conquer others.

Characters of the kind above-mentioned, conſiſting of mean and at the ſame time of agreeable qualities, regarded with diſapprobation, are yet regarded with ſome attention; they procure to themſelves ſome attachment; they excite neither fear, envy, nor ſuſpicion: as they are not reckoned noxious, the diſapprobation they produce is ſlight; and they yield or promote amuſement. What elſe are the race of paraſites both of ancient and modern times?—the *gnathonici* † of different ſorts, the direct and indirect, the ſmooth and the blunt?—thoſe who by aſſentation, buffoonery, and even

* Hume's Eſſay on Tragedy.

† Terence.

wit, or ſome appearance of wit, varied agreeably to the ſhifting manners of mankind, relieve the fatigue of ſloth; fill up the vacuity of minds that muſt, but cannot think; and are a ſuitable ſubſtitute, when the gorged appetite loathes the banquet, and the downy couch can allure no ſlumbers?

As perſons who diſplay cruel diſpoſitions, united with force of mind and ſuperior intellectual abilities, are regarded with indignation; ſo thoſe whoſe ruling deſires aim at the gratification of groſs appetite, united with good-humour, and ſuch intellectual endowments as may be fitted to gain favor, are regarded with ſcorn. "Scorn, * like "indignation, ſeems to ariſe from a com-"parative view of two objects, the one "worthy, and the other unworthy, which "are nevertheleſs united; but which, on "account of the wrong or impropriety oc-

* Eſſay on Richard the Third.

"caſioned

"caſioned by this incongruous union, we "conceive ſhould be diſunited and uncon-"nected." The difference between them ſeems to be, that the objects of indignation are great and important, thoſe of ſcorn little and unimportant. Indignation, of conſequence, leads us to expreſſions of anger: but ſcorn, as it denotes the feeling or diſcernment of inferiority, with ſuch mixture of pretenſions as to produce contraſt and incongruity, is often expreſſed by laughter; and is, in a ſerious mood, connected with pity. Diſdain is a-kin to indignation, and implies conſciouſneſs of inherent worth. You diſdain to act an unworthy part:

Diſdain, which ſprung from conſcious merit, flush'd
The cheeks of Dithyrambus.— GLOVER.

Contempt does not ſo much ariſe from ſuch conſciouſneſs, as from the perception of baſeneſs in the object. To deſpiſe, denotes a ſentiment between diſdain and contempt, which implies ſome opinion of our

own ſuperiority, and ſome opinion of inferiority in the object; but neither in their extremes *. Diſdain, like indignation, is allied to anger; contempt, like ſcorn, or more ſo, is connected with pity: but we often deſpiſe, without either pitying or being angry. When the meanneſs, which is the object of contempt, aſpires by pretenſions to a connection with merit, and the deſign appearing productive of no great harm, we are inclined to laugh: we are moved with ſcorn.

But in what manner ſo ever we underſtand the terms, for they are often confounded, and may not perhaps, in their uſual acceptation, be thought to convey the complete meaning here annexed to them; the diſtinctions themſelves have a real foundation: and that which we have chiefly in view at preſent, is fully il-

* Perhaps it denotes a kind of which diſdain and contempt are ſpecies: we contemn a threat, we diſdain an offer; we deſpiſe them both.

luſtrated

luſtrated in the character of Sir John Falſtaff. In him the effects ariſing from the "mixture of mean, grovelling, and baſe diſ-"poſitions with thoſe qualities and diſpo-"ſitions of a neutral kind, which afford "pleaſure; and though not in themſelves "objects of approbation, yet lead to at-"tachment, are diſtinctly felt and perceiv-"ed." In what follows of this diſcourſe, therefore, I ſhall firſt exemplify ſome of the baſer, and then ſome of thoſe agreeable parts of the character that reconcile our feelings, but not our reaſon, to its deformity.

PART II.

1. "The deſire of gratifying the groſſer "and lower appetites, is the ruling and "ſtrongeſt principle in the mind of Fal-"ſtaff." Such indulgence is the aim of his projects: upon this his conduct very uniformly hinges: and to this his other paſſions are not only ſubordinate, but ſubſervient.

His

His gluttony and love of dainty fare are admirably delineated in many paſſages; but with peculiar felicity in the following; where the poet diſplaying Falſtaff's ſenſuality, in a method that is humorous and indirect; and placing him in a ludicrous ſituation, reconciles us by his exquiſite pleaſantry to a mean object.

"*Poins.* Falſtaff!—faſt aſleep behind "the arras: and ſnorting like a horſe. "——*P. H.* Hark, how hard he fetches "breath! Search his pockets. What "haſt thou found?——*Poins.* Nothing "but papers, my Lord.——*P. H.* Let's "ſee what they be. Read them.—— "*Poins.* Item, a capon, 2*s.* 2*d.* Item, "Sauce, 4*d.* Item, Sack, two gallons, "5*s.* 8*d.* Item, Anchoves and ſack after "ſupper, 2*s.* 6*d.* Item. Bread, a half-"penny.——*P. H.* O monſtrous! but "one halfpenny worth of bread to this in-"tolerable deal of ſack!"——Who but Shakeſpeare could have made a tavern-bill

the

the ſubject of ſo much mirth; and ſo happily inſtrumental in the diſplay of character?

The ſenſuality of the character is alſo held forth in the humorous and ludicrous views that are given of his perſon.

"*Falſtaff.* The raſcal hath removed my "horſe, and tied him, I know not where. "If I travel but four feet by the ſquare "further a-foot, I ſhall break my wind. "Eight yards of uneven ground, is three-"ſcore and ten miles a-foot with me: and "the ſtony-hearted villains know it well "enough.——*P. H.* Peace, ye fat-guts! "lie down, lay thine ear cloſe to the "ground, and liſt if thou canſt hear the "tread of travellers.——*Falſtaff.* Have "you any levers to lift me up again, being "down? S'blood, I'll not bear mine own "fleſh ſo far a-foot again for all the coin in "thy father's exchequer."

2. Purſuing no other object than the gratification of bodily pleaſure, it is not wonderful

wonderful that in ſituations of danger, the care of the body ſhould be his chief concern. He avoids ſituations of danger: he does not wiſh to be valiant; and without ſtruggle or reluctance, adheres to his reſolution. Thus his cowardice ſeems to be the reſult of deliberation, rather than the effect of conſtitution *: and is a determined purpoſe of not expoſing to injury or deſtruction that corporeal ſtructure, foul and unwieldy tho' it be, on which his ſupreme enjoyment ſo completely depends. His well known ſoliloquy on honor diſplays a mind, that having neither enthuſiaſm for fame, nor ſenſe of reputation, is influenced in the hour of danger, by no principle but the fear of bodily pain: and if man were a mere ſentient and mortal animal, governed by no higher principle than ſenſual appetite, we might accede to his reaſoning.—"Can honour ſet a leg? "No: or an arm? No: or take away

* Eſſay on Shakeſpeare's Falſtaff.

"the

"the grief of a wound? No: honour hath "no ſkill in ſurgery then? No."—Thus while the ſpeaker, in expreſſing his real ſentiments, affects a playful manner, he affords a curious example of ſelf-impoſition, of an attempt to diſguiſe conſcious demerit, and eſcape from conſcious diſapprobation.

3. As perſons whoſe ſtrongeſt principle is the love of fame, are nevertheleſs moved by inferior appetites, and ſeek occaſionally their gratification; ſo the ſenſualiſt, conſtructed originally like the reſt of mankind, may be ſometimes moved by the deſire of praiſe or diſtinction. Or, connecting this deſire, and the circumſtance we have to mention, more intimately with the ruling power, we may ſuppoſe that he finds the good-will, and conſequently the good opinion, of his aſſociates, requiſite or favorable to his enjoyments, and may wiſh therefore to gain their regard. The diſtinction, however, or eſteem, to which he aſpires, is not

for the reality, but the appearance, of merit; about the reality, provided he appear meretorious, he is quite unconcerned.

4. Now this diſpoſition leads to preſumption, to boaſtful affectation and vain-glory.—Falſtaff is boaſtful and vain-glorious. He wiſhes, on many occaſions, and manifeſtly for ſelfiſh purpoſes, to be reckoned a perſon of conſummate and undaunted courage. He ſpeaks of cowardice with contempt, and affects the firmneſs or conſcious valour: "A plague of all cowards, I ſay, and a vengeance too, marry and amen." He would alſo paſs for a man whoſe aſſiſtance is of conſequence, or whoſe favor deſerves to be courted; and in both theſe attempts he is ſometimes, though not always, ſucceſsful. His hoſteſs and Shallow may be impoſed upon; but he is better known to Prince Henry.—Conſiſtently with, or in conſequence of this vain-glorious diſpoſition, whenever he finds himſelf reſpected, and that he is reckoned

a perſon

a perſon of ſome importance, he affects pride, becomes inſolent, arrogant, and overbearing. It is in this manner he treats his hoſteſs, Bardolph, and other inferior aſſociates. "*P. H.* They take it already upon "their ſalvation, that though I be but "Prince of Wales, yet I am king of cour-"teſy; and tell me flatly, I am no proud "Jack, like Falſtaff."

5. Falſtaff is alſo deceitful: for the connection between vain-glorious affectation, and unembarraſſed, unreluctant deceit, is natural and intimate. He is deceitful in every form of falſehood. He is a flatterer: he is even hypocritical; and tells the chief juſtice that he has "loſt his voice ſinging anthems."

6. Shakeſpeare intending to diſplay the magic of his ſkill by rendering a mean character highly intereſting, has added to it as many bad qualities as, conſiſtently with one another and with his main deſign, can be united in one aſſemblage. He accord-

ingly repreſents him, not only as a voluptuary, cowardly, vain-glorious, with all the arrogance connected with vain-glory, and deceitful in every ſhape of deceit; but injurious, incapable of gratitude or of friendſhip, and vindictive. The chief object of his life being the indulgence of low appetite, he has no regard for right or wrong; and in order to compaſs his unworthy deſigns, he practiſes fraud and injuſtice. His attachments are mercenary: he ſpeaks diſreſpectfully of Prince Henry, to whoſe friendſhip he is indebted; and values his friendſhip for convenience rather than from regard. He is alſo vindictive: but as he expreſſes his revengeful intention, without any opportunity of diſplaying it in action, his reſentment becomes ridiculous. His menace againſt the chief Juſtice, though illiberal and malicious, is not regarded with indignation. One mode of his vengeance is to defame thoſe that offend him by unwarrantable publications. "He will print them," ſays Page, ſpeaking about

about ſome of his ill-intentioned letters, "for he cares not what he puts into the "preſs."

From the foregoing enumeration, it appears abundantly manifeſt, that our poet intended to repreſent Falſtaff as very mean and worthleſs; but, agreeably to an ingenious and peculiar method of unfolding the real character, and which he practiſes on ſome other occaſions when he would obviate miſapprehenſion, he embraces a good opportunity of making one of the moſt diſcerning perſonages connected with him, give the real delineation. Prince Henry has all along a clear and decided view of Falſtaff; and in the admirable ſcene where the King is perſonated as reproving his ſon, he thus deſcribes him: "Thou art vio-"lently carried away from grace: there is "a devil haunts thee in the likeneſs of an "old fat man: a tun of man is thy compa-"nion. Why doſt thou converſe with that "trunk of humours, &c. that ſtuff'd cloak-

" bag of guts, that roaſted Manningtree ox " with the pudding in his belly, that reve- " rend vice, that grey iniquity, that vanity " in years? Wherein is he good, but to taſte " ſack and drink it? Wherein neat and " cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? " Wherein cunning but in craft? Wherein " crafty but in villany? Wherein villanous, " but in all things? Wherein worthy, but " in nothing?"—We have here the real moral character; we have an enumeration of diſguſtful and baſe qualities, without a ſingle circumſtance to palliate or relieve. The ſpeaker enlarges on his *ſenſuality* as the leading feature in the character, and the principle on which every thing elſe in his enumeration depends. How then comes Falſtaff to be a favorite? a favorite with Prince Henry? and a favorite on the Engliſh ſtage? For he not only makes us laugh, but, it muſt be acknowledged, is regarded with ſome affection. The anſwer to theſe enquiries leads us to our laſt and chief

chief diviſion: it leads to illuſtrate the aſſociated and blended qualities which not only reconcile us to the repreſentation, but by their mixture give us ſingular pleaſure.

PART III.

Thoſe qualities in the character of Sir John Falſtaff which may be accounted eſtimable are of two different kinds, the ſocial and intellectual.

I. His ſocial qualities are joviality and good-humour. Theſe diſpoſitions though they are generally agreeable, and may in one ſenſe of the word be termed moral, as influencing the manners and deportment of mankind, are not on all occaſions, as we ſhall ſee exemplified in the preſent inſtance, to be accounted virtuous. They may be agreeable without being objects of approbation. Perſons who have never given much exerciſe to their minds, whoſe powers of intellect and imagination languiſh

through inexertion, can ſeldom have much enjoyment in being alone. He who cannot think, muſt fly from himſelf; and, without having much regard for others, will ſeek relief in ſociety. But as the bulk of mankind are not very inquiſitive about the motives or cauſes of thoſe actions that do not intereſt them very much, they are pleaſed with ſuch appearances of a reliſh for ſocial intercourſe; they are prepoſſeſſed in favor of thoſe who court their fellowſhip, or who in their company diſcover chearfulneſs and complacency.

Falſtaff's love of ſociety needs no illuſtration; and that it is unconnected with friendſhip or affection is no leſs apparent. Yet the quality renders him acceptable.—It receives great additional recommendation from his good-humour. As, amongſt thoſe whom he wiſhes to pleaſe, he is not ſullen nor reſerved, neither is he moroſe, nor apt to contradict or be offended. Perſons of active minds are moſt liable to ſuch exceſſes.

Whether

Whether they engage in the purſuits of fame, fortune, or even of amuſement, they form ſchemes, indulge expectation, are diſquieted with ſolicitude, elated with joy, or vexed with diſappointment. The activity of their ſpirits expoſes them to more occaſions of diſcompoſure; and their ſenſibility, natural or acquired, renders them more ſuſceptible of impreſſions than other men. Hence, without careful diſcipline or ſteady reſolution, they are apt to become uncomplying, violent, or impetuous. But the mere voluptuary is expoſed to no ſuch perverſion. He who never engages in ſerious argument, who maintains no opinion, who contrives no intricate or extenſive projects, who is connected with no party, or concerned in no ſpeculation, who has no intereſt in any thing or any perſon beyond the gratification of mere appetite, has no object to contend for, nothing that can make him ſo eager, ſo tenacious, ſo obſtinate, or unyielding as perſons of a different character.

In ſuch men, ſo ſlight a deſire as that of being acceptable to ſome particular perſons will, in their company, counterbalance every tendency to fretfulneſs, inſolence, or ill-humour. Such ſeems to be the good-humour of Falſtaff; for our poet diſcriminates with exquiſite judgment, and delineates his conception with power. He does not attribute to Falſtaff the good temper flowing from inherent goodneſs and genuine mildneſs of diſpoſition; for in company with thoſe about whoſe good opinion he has little concern, though his vacuity of mind obliges him to have recourſe to their company, he is often inſolent and overbearing. It is chiefly with Prince Henry, and thoſe whom he wiſhes, from vanity, or ſome ſelfiſh purpoſe, to think well of him, that he is moſt facetious.—The degree or real force of any quality is never ſo diſtinctly marked, as when it is put to the teſt by ſuch trying circumſtances as tend to deſtroy its exiſtence. Shakeſpeare ſeems aware of this; and, in the

firſt

firſt ſcene between the Prince and Falſtaff, this part of the character is fully tried and diſplayed. The Prince attacks Falſtaff in a conteſt of banter and raillery. The Knight for ſome time defends himſelf with dexterity and ſucceſs. But the Prince's jeſts are more ſevere than witty; they ſuggeſt ſome harſh truths, and ſome well-founded terrors.——"*P. H.* The fortune "of us that are the moon's men, doth ebb "and flow like the ſea, being governed as "the ſea is by the moon: now in as low "an ebb as the foot of the ladder; and by "and by in as high a flow as the ridge of "the gallows."——Such retorts are too ſerious. The Knight endeavours to reply; but he is overcome; he feels himſelf vanquiſhed.

"*Falſtaff.* S'blood, I am as melancholy "as a gib cat, or a lugg'd bear." But he is not ſullen, nor moroſe. His melancholy, as he terms it, does not appear in ill-humour, but in a laboured and not very ſucceſsful

ceſsful attempt to be witty. He is deſirous of ſeeming in good ſpirits, and embraces the firſt opportunity given him by the Prince, of recovering them.——"*Falſtaff.* "S'blood, I am as melancholy as a gib "cat or a lugg'd bear.——*P. H.* Or an "old lion, or a lover's lute.——*Falſtaff.* "Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnſhire bag-"pipe.——*P. H.* What ſayeſt thou to a "hare, or the melancholy of Moor-ditch? "——*Falſtaff.* Thou haſt the moſt un-"ſavory ſimilies, &c. But, Hal, I pray "thee, trouble me no more with vanity. "I would to God, thou and I knew where "a commodity of good names were to be "bought, &c. Thou haſt done much "harm unto me, Hal; God forgive thee "for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew "nothing; and now am I, if a man ſhould "ſpeak truly, little better than one of the "wicked, &c.——*P. H.* Where ſhall we "take a purſe to-morrow, Jack?——*Fal-*"*ſtaff.* Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make

"one;

"one; an' I do not, call me villain, and "baffle me."

II. Having ſhewn that Falſtaff poſſeſſes as much love of ſociety, and as much good-temper as are conſiſtent with the deſpicable paſſions of the ſenſualiſt; and which, though agreeable, are not in him to be accounted virtuous; I proceed to exemplify his intellectual endowments: and of theſe his talents for wit and humour are the moſt peculiar.

1. His wit is of various kinds. It is ſometimes a play upon words.—"*Falſtaff.* "I call thee coward! I'll ſee thee damn'd, "ere I call thee coward. But I would "give a thouſand pounds I could run as "faſt as thou canſt. You are ſtraight "enough in the ſhoulders. You care not "who ſees your back. Call you that "backing of your friends? A plague upon "ſuch backing! Give me them that will face "me."——It ſometimes depends on felicity of alluſion.——"*Falſtaff*," to Bardolph, "Thou

"Thou art our admiral, thou bearest the "lanthorn in the poop; but 'tis in the nose "of thee. Thou art the knight of the "burning lamp, &c. I never see thy face, "but I think on hell-fire, and Dives that "liv'd in purple, &c. O thou art a per-"petual triumph, an everlasting bonfire "light: When thou ran'st up Gads-hill, "in the night, to catch my horse; if I did "not think thou hadst been an ignis fatuus, "or a ball of wild-fire, there is no pur-"chase in money."——One of the most agreeable species of wit, and which Falstaff uses with great success, is the ridiculous comparison. It consists in classing or uniting together, by similitude, objects that excite feelings so opposite as that some may be accounted great, and others little, some noble, and others mean: and this is done, when in their structure, appearance, or effects, they have circumstances of resemblance abundantly obvious when pointed out, though on account of the great difference

ference in their general impreſſion, not uſually attended to; but which being ſelected by the man of witty invention, as bonds of intimate union, enable him, by an unexpected connection, to produce ſurpriſe. Of this ſome of the preceding alluſions, which are united with, or involve in them compariſons, are inſtances: but the following paſſage affords a more direct illuſtration.——"*Falſtaff*," ſpeaking of Shallow, "I do remember him at Clement's-"inn, like a man made after ſupper with "a cheeſe-paring. When he was naked, "he was for all the world like a forked "radiſh, with a head fantaſtically carved "upon it with a knife."——Another very exquiſite ſpecies of wit conſiſts in explaining great, ſerious, or important appearances, by inadequate and trifling cauſes *. This, if one may ſay ſo, is a grave and ſolemn ſpecies; and produces its effect by the affectation of formal and deep reſearch.

* Elements of Criticiſm.

Falſtaff

Falſtaff gives the following example: "A "good ſherris ſack has a two-fold opera- "tion: it aſcends me into the brain: dries "me there all the fooliſh, and dull, and "crudy vapours, which environ it: makes "it apprehenſive, quick, forgetive: full of "nimble, fiery, and delectable ſhapes; "which delivered over to the voice (the "tongue) which is the birth, becomes ex- "cellent wit."

But Falſtaff is not more diſtinguiſhed for wit than humour: and affords ſome good illuſtrations of the difference between them. Wit conſiſts in the thought; and produces its effect, namely laughter, or a tendency to laughter, in whatſoever way, and by whomſoever it may be ſpoken. Humour again depends on action: it exhibits ſomething done; or ſomething ſaid in a peculiar manner. The action or the thing ſaid may be in themſelves indifferent; but derive their power of exciting laughter from the intention and mode of doing

doing or of ſaying them. Wit is permanent: it remains in the witty ſaying, by whomſoever it is ſaid, and independent not only of perſons, but of circumſtances or ſituation. But in humour the action or ſaying is ineffectual, unleſs connected with the character, the intention, manner, or ſituation of ſome ſpeaker or agent. The one ſeems to depend on connection, invented or diſplayed unexpectedly, between incongruous and diſſonant objects, or parts of objects: the other in the invention or diſplay of ſuch connection between actions and manners incongruous to an occaſion. The one preſents combinations that may be termed ridiculous; the other ſuch as are ludicrous. The incongruity and diſſonance in both caſes ſeem chiefly to reſpect, not ſo much the greatneſs or littleneſs, as the dignity and meanneſs, of the connected objects. The amuſement is moſt complete, when the witty thought is expreſſed with humour. When this is

not the caſe, though we diſcern the witty combination, we do not feel its entire effect. Among many others, the firſt ſcene between Falſtaff and the Chief Juſtice is highly humorous. It contains no wit in the beginning, which is indeed the moſt amuſing part of the dialogue: and the witticiſms introduced in the concluſion, excepting the firſt or ſecond puns, are neither of a ſuperior kind, nor executed with great ſucceſs. The Juſtice comes to reprove Falſtaff: and the amuſement conſiſts in Falſtaff's pretending, firſt of all, not to ſee him; and then, in pretending deafneſs, ſo as neither to underſtand his meſſage, nor the purport of his converſation.——"*Ch.* "*Juſ.* Sir John Falſtaff, a word with you. "——*Falſtaff.* My good lord! God give "your lordſhip good time of day. I am "glad to ſee your lordſhip abroad: I heard "ſay your lordſhip was ſick: I hope your "lordſhip goes abroad by advice.—— "*Ch. Juſ.* Sir John, I ſent for you, before

"your

" your expedition to Shrewſbury.——*Fal-*
" *ſtaff.* If it pleaſe your lordſhip, I hear
" his majeſty is returned with ſome diſ-
" comfort from Wales.——*Ch. Juſ.* I talk
" not of his majeſty. You would not
" come when I ſent for you.——*Fal.* And
" I hear, moreover, his highneſs is fallen
" into this ſame whoreſon apoplexy.——
" *Ch. Juſ.* Well, Heaven mend him. I
" pray, let me ſpeak with you.——*Fal.*
" This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of
" lethargy, an't pleaſe your lordſhip; a
" kind of ſleeping in the blood; a whore-
" ſon tingling.——*Ch. Juſ.* What tell you
" me of it! be it as it is.——*Fal.* It hath
" its original in much grief; from ſtudy,
" and perturbation of the brain," &c.——
The Chief Juſtice becomes at length impatient, and compels Falſtaff to hear and give him a direct anſwer. But the Knight is not without his reſources. Driven out of the ſtrong hold of humour, he betakes himſelf to the weapons of wit.——" *Ch.*

" *Juſ.* The truth is, Sir John, you live in " great infamy.——*Fal.* He that buckles " himſelf in my belt cannot live in leſs. " ——*Ch. Juſ.* Your means are very ſlen- " der, and your waſte great.——*Fal.* I " would it were otherwiſe. I would my " means were greater, and my waiſt ſlen- " derer."——Falſtaff is not unacquainted with the nature and value of his talents. He employs them not merely for the ſake of merriment, but to promote ſome deſign. He wiſhes, by his drollery in this ſcene, to cajole the Chief Juſtice. In one of the following acts, he practiſes the ſame artifice with the Prince of Lancaſter. He fails, however, in his attempt: and that it was a ſtudied attempt appears from his ſubſequent reflections. " Good faith, this ſame " young ſober-blooded boy doth not love " me; nor a man cannot make him laugh." That his pleaſantry, whether witty or humorous, is often ſtudied and premeditated, appears alſo from other paſſages. " I

" will

"will deviſe matter enough out of this "Shallow to keep Prince Henry in conti-"nual laughter. O you ſhall ſee him "laugh, till his face be like a wet cloak ill "laid up."

It may alſo be remarked, that the guiſe or raiment, ſo to ſay, with which Falſtaff inveſts thoſe different ſpecies of wit and humour, is univerſally the ſame. It is grave, and even ſolemn. He would always appear in earneſt. He does not laugh himſelf, unleſs compelled by a ſympathetic emotion with the laughter of others. He may ſometimes indeed indulge a ſmile of ſeeming contempt or indignation: but it is perhaps on no occaſion when he would be witty or humorous. Shakeſpeare ſeems to have thought this particular of importance, and has therefore put it out of all doubt by making Falſtaff himſelf inform us; "O it "is much that a lie with a ſlight oath, and "a jeſt with a *ſad brow*, will do with a fel-

" low that never had the ache in his ſhoul-
" ders."

As the wit of Falſtaff is various, and finely blended with humour, it is alſo eaſy and genuine. It diſplays no quaint conceits, ſtudied antitheſes, or elaborate contraſts. Excepting in two or three inſtances, we have no far-fetched or unſucceſsful puns. Neither has the poet recourſe, for ludicrous ſituation, to frequent and diſguſting diſplays of drunkeneſs: We have little or no ſwearing, and leſs obſcenity than from the rudeneſs of the times and the condition of ſome of the other ſpeakers we might have expected.—Much ridicule is excited by ſome of the other characters: but their wit, when they attempt to be witty, is different from that of Falſtaff. Prince Henry's wit conſiſts chiefly in banter and raillery. In his ſatirical alluſions, he is often more ſevere than pleaſant. The wit of Piſtol, if it be intended for wit, is altogether affected,

affected, and is of a kind which Falſtaff never diſplays. It is an affectation of pompous language; an attempt at the mock-heroic; and conſiſts in employing inflated diction on common occaſions. The ſpeaker does not poſſeſs, but aim at wit; and, for want of other reſources, endeavours to procure a laugh by odd expreſſions, and an abſurd application of learned and lofty phraſes.

" Doſt thou thirſt, baſe Trojan,
" To have me fold up Parca's fatal web?"

Falſtaff's page being only a novice, attempts to be witty after the inflated manner of Piſtol: but being ſuppoſed to have profited by his maſter's example, he is more ſucceſsful, and his pompous phraſes have a witty meaning.——"*Page*" to Bardolph, "Away, " thou raſcally Althea's dream! away!—— " *P. H.* Inſtruct us, boy; what dream, " boy?——*Page*. Marry, my lord, Althea " dreamed ſhe was delivered of a fire- " brand; and therefore I call him her

" dream."——The laughter excited by the reſt of Falſtaff's aſſociates, is not by the wit or humour of the ſpeaker, but by ludicrous ſituation, ridiculous views of peculiar manners, and the abſurd miſapplication of language. Thus in the admirable and inſtructive account given by the hoſteſs of Falſtaff's death—" Nay, ſure he's not in " hell; he's in Arthur's boſom, if ever man " went to Arthur's boſom. He made a finer " end, and went away an' it had been any " Chriſtom'd child; a' parted even juſt be- " tween twelve and one, even at the turn- " ing o' the tide: for after I ſaw him " fumble with the ſheets, and play with " flowers, and ſmile upon his finger's ends, " I knew there was but one way; for his " noſe was as ſharp as a pen. How now, " Sir John? quoth I: what, man, be of " good cheer: ſo 'a cried out, God, God, " God, three or four times. Now I, to " comfort him, bid him a' ſhould not think " of God; I hoped there was no need to

" trouble

"trouble himſelf with any ſuch thoughts "yet: ſo a' bade me lay more cloaths on "his feet. I put my hand into the bed, "and felt them; and they were as cold as "a ſtone; then I felt to his knees, and ſo "upward, and upward; and all was as cold "as any ſtone."

2. The other intellectual talents attributed by our poet to Sir John Falſtaff, are diſcernment of character, verſatility, and dexterity in the management of mankind; a diſcernment, however, and a dexterity of a peculiar and limited ſpecies; limited to the power of diſcerning whether or not men may be rendered fit for his purpoſes; and to the power of managing them as the inſtruments of his enjoyment.

We may remark his diſcernment of mankind, and his dexterity in employing them, in his conduct towards the Prince, to Shallow, and his inferior aſſociates.—He flatters the Prince, but he uſes ſuch flattery as is intended to impoſe on a perſon of under-

ſtanding. He flatters him indirectly. He ſeems to treat him with familiarity: he affects to be diſpleaſed with him: he rallies him; and contends with him in the field of wit. When he gives praiſe, it is inſinuated; or it ſeems reluctant, accidental, and extorted by the power of truth. In like manner, when he would impreſs him with a belief of his affectionate and firm attachment, he proceeds by inſinuation; he would have it appear involuntary, the effect of ſtrong irreſiſtible impulſe; ſo ſtrong as to appear preternatural. "If the raſcal hath not "given me medicines to make me love "him, I'll be hang'd." Yet his aim is not merely to pleaſe the Prince: it is to corrupt and govern him; and to make him bend to his purpoſes, and become the inſtrument of his pleaſures. He makes the attempt: he ſeizes, what he thinks a good opportunity, by charging him with cowardice at the encounter of Gads-hill: he is deſirous of finding him a coward; puſhes his

his attack as far as poſſible; ſuffers ſudden repulſe: but with great verſatility and addreſs retires to his former faſtneſs.—"*Falſtaff.* Are you not a coward? anſwer "me that: and Poins there?—*P. H.* "Ye fat paunch, an' ye call me coward, "I'll ſtab thee.—*Falſtaff.* I call thee "coward! I'll ſee thee damned ere I call "thee coward. But I would give a thou-"ſand pounds I could run as faſt as thou "canſt, &c."—His behaviour to Shallow and Slender is different, becauſe their characters are different. He fathoms them, and ſteers a correſponding courſe. He treats them at firſt with ſuch deference as he would render to men of ſenſe and condition. He tries whether or no it be poſſible to allure them by his uſual artifice; he is good-humoured, ſocial, and witty. But the wit he tries upon them is of his loweſt kind: and he has no occaſion for any other. They are delighted, and expreſs admiration. "—*Falſtaff.* Is thy name Mouldy?

—"*Mouldy.*

" ——*Mouldy*. Yea, an't pleaſe you.——
" *Falſtaff*. It is the more time thou wert
" uſed.——*Shallow*. Ha! ha! ha! moſt
" excellent, I'faith: things that are mouldy
" lack uſe. Well ſaid, Sir John, very well
" ſaid." He thus penetrates into their character, and conducts himſelf in a ſuitable manner. He no longer gives himſelf the trouble of amuſing them. He is no longer witty: he affects the dignity of a great man, and is ſparing of his converſation. " I do
" ſee the bottom," ſays he, " of Juſtice
" Shallow." Meanwhile Shallow and Slender become in their turns ſolicitous of pleaſing *him*: they believe him a man of great conſequence: they think even of making him *their* dupe, and of employing him as the engine of their petty ambition. He indulges their folly, lets them entangle themſelves in the ſnare; endures their converſation, and does them the ſignal honor of borrowing a thouſand pounds.—His treatment of his hoſteſs and Bardolph is no leſs dexterous; but

but from the aſcendant he has obtained, it is not ſo difficult, and is managed by the poet in the moſt inoffenſive manner.

3. Another kind of ability diſplayed by our hero, is the addreſs with which he defies detection and extricates himſelf out of difficulty. He is never at a loſs. His preſence of mind never forſakes him. Having no ſenſe of character, he is never troubled with ſhame. Though frequently detected, or in danger of detection, his inventive faculty never ſleeps; it is never totally overwhelmed: or if it be ſurpriſed into a momentary intermiſſion of its power, it forthwith recovers, and ſupplies him with freſh reſources. He is furniſhed with palliatives and excuſes for every emergency. Beſides other effects produced by this diſplay of ability, it tends to amuſe and excite laughter: for we are amuſed by the application of inadequate and ridiculous cauſes. Of the talent now mentioned we have many inſtances. Thus when detected by Prince Henry

Henry in his boaſtful pretenſions to courage, he tells him that he knew him. "Was it "for me," ſays he, "to kill the heir-appa-"rent?" So alſo in another ſcene, when he is detected in his abuſe of the Prince, and overheard even by the Prince himſelf. "No abuſe, Ned, in the world; honeſt "Ned, none. I diſpraiſed him before "the wicked, that the wicked might not "fall in love with him."—In the admirable ſcene where he is detected in falſely and injuriouſly charging his hoſteſs with having picked his pocket of ſome very valuable articles, whereas the theft was chiefly of the ludicrous tavern-bill formerly mentioned, his eſcape is ſingularly remarkable. He does not juſtify himſelf by any plea of innocence. He does not colour nor palliate his offence. He cares not what baſeneſs may be imputed to himſelf: all that he deſires is, that others may not be ſpotleſs. If he can make them appear baſe, ſo much the better. For how can they blame him, if they themſelves are blameable? On the

preſent

preſent occaſion he has ſome opportunity. He ſees and employs it. The Prince, in rifling his pocket, had deſcended to an undignified action. The treſpaſs indeed was ſlight, and Falſtaff could not reckon it otherwiſe. But Prince Henry, poſſeſſing the delicacies of honor, felt it with peculiar acuteneſs. Falſtaff, aware of this, employs the Prince's feelings as a counterpart to his own baſeneſs, and is ſucceſsful. It is on this particular point, though not uſually attended to, becauſe managed with much addreſs, that his preſent reſource depends.——" *P. H.* Thou ſayeſt true, " Hoſteſs, and he ſlanders thee moſt groſsly. " *Hoſt.* So doth he you, my lord; and " ſaid this day you ow'd him a thouſand " pound.——*P. H.* Sirrah, do I owe you a " thouſand pound?——*Falſtaff.* A thou- " ſand pound, Hal? a million: thy love is " worth a million: thou oweſt me thy love. " ——*Hoſt.* Nay, my lord, he called you " Jack, and ſaid he would cudgel you.——

Falſtaff.

" *Falſtaff.* Did I, Bardolph?——*Bardolph.*
" Indeed, Sir John, you ſaid ſo.——*Fal-*
" *ſtaff.* Yea, if he ſaid my ring was cop-
" per.——*P. H.* I ſay 'tis copper. Dar'ſt
" thou be as good as thy word now?——
" *Falſtaff.* Why, Hal, thou knoweſt, as
" thou art but a man, I dare; but as thou
" art a Prince, I fear thee, as I fear the
" roaring of the lion's whelp.——*P. H.*
" And why not as the lion?——*Falſtaff.*
" The King himſelf is to be fear'd as the
" lion; doſt thou think I'll fear thee as I
" fear thy father? Nay, if I do, let my
" girdle break!——*P. H.* O, if it ſhould,
" how would thy guts fall about thy knees!
" But, Sirrah, there's no room for faith,
" truth, nor honeſty in this boſom of thine;
" it is all filled up with guts and midriff.
" Charge an honeſt woman with picking
" thy pocket! why, thou whoreſon, impu-
" dent, imboſſed raſcal, if there were
" any thing in thy pocket but tavern reck-
" onings, memorandums of bawdy-houſes,
" and

"and one poor penny-worth of ſugar-
"candy to make thee long-winded; if thy
"pocket were enriched with any other in-
"juries but theſe, I am a villain; and yet
"you will ſtand to it, you will not pocket
"up wrongs. Art thou not aſham'd?
"—— *Falſtaff.* Doſt thou hear, Hal?
"thou knoweſt in the ſtate of innocency
"Adam fell; and what ſhould poor Jack
"Falſtaff do in the days of villany? Thou
"ſeeſt I have more fleſh than another man,
"and therefore more frailty." Then he adds, after an emphatic pauſe, and no doubt with a pointed application in the manner:—"*You* confeſs then that *you* "picked my pocket?" Prince Henry's reply is very remarkable. It is not direct: it contains no longer any raillery or reproach; it is almoſt a ſhuffling anſwer, and may be ſuppoſed to have been ſpoken after, or with ſome conſcious confuſion:—"It "appears ſo," ſays he, "from the ſtory." Falſtaff puſhes him no further; but expreſ-

ſes his triumph, under the ſhew of moderation and indifference, in his addreſs to the hoſteſs.——"Hoſteſs, I forgive thee; go, "make ready breakfaſt; love thy huſband; "look to thy ſervants; and cheriſh thy "gueſts: thou ſhalt find me tractable to "any honeſt reaſon: thou ſeeſt I am paci-"fied ſtill."—I ſhall illuſtrate this particular circumſtance in one other inſtance, not only becauſe it is in itſelf curious; but tends to elucidate what may, without impropriety, be termed the cataſtrophè. Falſtaff having impoſed upon Shallow, borrows from him a thouſand pounds. He has impoſed upon him, by making him believe that his influence with the Prince, now King Henry, was all-powerful. Here the poet's good ſenſe, his ſenſe of propriety, his judgment, and invention, are indeed remarkable. It was not for a perſon ſo ſenſual, ſo cowardly, ſo arrogant, and ſo ſelfiſh as Falſtaff, to triumph in his deceitful arts. But his puniſhment muſt be ſuitable. He is not a criminal

criminal like Richard; and his recompence muſt be different. Detection, diſappointment in his fraudulent purpoſes, and the downfal of aſſumed importance, will ſatisfy poetical juſtice: and for ſuch retribution, even from his earlieſt appearance, we ſee due preparation. The puniſhment is to be the reſult of his conduct, and to be accompliſhed by a regular progreſs *.—Falſtaff, who was ſtudious of impoſing on others, impoſes upon himſelf. He becomes the dupe of his own artifice. Confident in his verſatility, command of temper, preſence of mind, and unabaſhed invention; encouraged too by the notice of the Prince, and thus flattering himſelf that he ſhall have ſome ſway in his counſels, he lays the foundation of his own diſappointment. Though the flatterer and paraſite of Prince Henry, he does not deceive him. The Prince is thoroughly acquainted with his character, and

* Butler's Analogy.

is aware of his views. Yet in his wit, humour, and invention he finds amuſement. —Paraſites, in the works of other poets, are the flatterers of weak men, and impreſs them with a belief of their merit or attachment. But Falſtaff is the paraſite of a perſon diſtinguiſhed for ability or underſtanding. The Prince ſees him in his real colours; yet, for the ſake of preſent paſtime, he ſuffers himſelf to ſeem deceived; and allows the paraſite to flatter himſelf that his arts are not unſucceſsful. The real ſtate of his ſentiments and feelings is finely deſcribed, when at the battle of Shrewſbury, ſeeing Falſtaff lying among ſome dead bodies, he ſuppoſes him dead. "What! old ac-"quaintance! could not all this fleſh "keep in a little life? Poor Jack, fare-"well. I could have better ſpared a better "man: O I ſhould have a heavy miſs of "thee, if I were much in love with va-"nity." But Prince Henry is not much in love with vanity. By his acceſſion to

the

the throne he feels himſelf under new obligations; and under the neceſſity of relinquiſhing improper purſuits. As he forms his reſolution conſiderately, he adheres to it ſtrictly. He does not heſitate, nor tamper with inclination. He does not gradually looſen, but burſts his fetters. "He "caſts no longing lingering look behind." He forſakes every mean purſuit, and diſcards every worthleſs dependent. But he diſcards them with humanity: it is to avoid their influence, for all wiſe men avoid temptation; it is not to puniſh, but to correct their vices.

"I baniſh thee, on pain of death,
"Not to come near our perſon by ten miles!
"For competence of life I will allow you,
"That lack of means enforce you not to evil:
"And as we hear you do reform yourſelves,
"We will, according to your ſtrengths and qua-
"lities,
"Give you advancement."

Thus in the ſelf-deceit of Falſtaff, and

in the diſcernment of Henry, held out to us on all occaſions, we have a natural foundation for the cataſtrophe. The incidents too, by which it is accompliſhed, are judiciouſly managed. None of them are foreign or external, but grow, as it were, out of the characters.

Falſtaff brings Shallow to London to ſee and profit by his influence at court. He places himſelf in King Henry's way, as he returns from the coronation. He addreſſes him with familiarity; is neglected; perſiſts, and is repulſed with ſternneſs. His hopes are unexpectedly baffled: his vanity blaſted: he ſees his importance with thoſe whom he had deceived completely ruined: he is for a moment unmaſked: he views himſelf as he believes he appears to them: he ſees himſelf in the mirror of their conception: he runs over the conſequences of his humiliation: he tranſlates their thoughts and their opinions concerning him: he ſpeaks to

to them in the tone of the ſentiments which he attributes to them; and in the language which he thinks they would hold. "Maſter Shallow, I owe you a thouſand "pounds." It is not that in his abaſement he feels a tranſient return of virtue: it is rather that he ſees himſelf for a moment helpleſs: he ſees his aſſumed importance deſtroyed; and, among other conſequences, that reſtitution of the ſum he had borrowed will be required. This alarms him; and Shallow's anſwer gives him ſmall conſolation. He is rouſed from his ſudden amazement: looks about for reſources: and immediately finds them. His ingenuity comes inſtantly to his aid; and he tells Shallow, with great readineſs and plauſibility of invention, "Do not you "grieve at this? I ſhall be ſent for in pri-"vate to him: look you, he muſt ſeem "thus to the world. Fear not your ad-"vancement. I will be the man yet that "ſhall make you great, &c. This that

" you heard was but a colour, &c. Go " with me to dinner. Come, lieutenant " Piſtol; come, Bardolph; I ſhall be ſent " for ſoon at night."

Thus Shakeſpeare, whoſe morality is no leſs ſublime than his ſkill in the diſplay of character is maſterly and unrivalled, repreſents Falſtaff, not only as a voluptuous and baſe ſycophant, but totally incorrigible. He diſplays no quality or diſpoſition which can ſerve as a baſis for reformation. Even his abilities and agreeable qualities contribute to his depravity. Had he been leſs facetious, leſs witty, leſs dexterous, and leſs inventive, he might have been urged to ſelf-condemnation, and ſo inclined to amendment. But mortification leads him to no conviction of folly, nor determines him to any change of life. He turns, as ſoon as poſſible, from the view given him of his baſeneſs; and rattles as it were in triumph, the fetters of habituated and willing bondage.—Lear, violent and impetuous,

impetuous, but yet affectionate; from his misfortunes derives improvement. Macbeth, originally a man of feeling, is capable of remorſe. And the underſtanding of Richard, rugged and inſenſible though he be, betrays his heart to the aſſault of conſcience. But the mean ſenſualiſt, incapable of honorable and worthy thoughts, is irretrievably loſt; totally, and for ever depraved. An important and awful leſſon!

I may be thought perhaps to have treated Falſtaff with too much ſeverity. I am aware of his being a favorite. Perſons of eminent worth feel for him ſome attachment, and think him hardly uſed by the King. But if they will allow themſelves to examine the character in all its parts, they will perhaps agree with me, that ſuch feeling is deluſive, and ariſes from partial views. They will not take it amiſs, if I ſay that they are deluded in the ſame manner with Prince Henry. They are amuſed, and conceive an impro-

per attachment to the means of their pleaſure and amuſement. I appeal to every candid reader, whether the ſentiment expreſſed by Prince Henry is not that which every judicious ſpectator and reader is inclined to feel.

"I could have better ſpar'd a better man."

Upon the whole, the character of Sir John Falſtaff, conſiſting of various parts, produces various feelings. Some of theſe are agreeable and ſome diſagreeable: but, being blended together, the general and united effect is much ſtronger than if their impulſe had been diſunited: not only ſo, but as the agreeable qualities are brought more into view, for in this ſenſe alone they can be ſaid to prevail in the character; and as the deformity of other qualities is often veiled by the pleaſantry employed by the poet in their diſplay, the general effect is in the higheſt degree delightful.

ON

SHAKESPEARE'S

IMITATION OF

FEMALE CHARACTERS,

ADDRESSED TO A FRIEND.

I CANNOT agree with you, that Shakeſpeare has exerted more ability in his imitation of male, than of female characters. Before you form a decided opinion on a ſubject ſo intereſting to his reputation, let me requeſt your attention to the following particulars. If you conſider them at all, it will be with candour: and with ſo much the more attention, that they are in favour of a Poet whom you admire, and, I might add, of a ſex whom you adore. If Shakeſpeare, with thoſe embelliſhments which we expect in poetry, has allotted to the females on his theatre ſuch ſtations

ſtations as are ſuitable to their condition in ſociety, and delineated them with ſufficient diſcrimination, he has done all that we have any right to require. According to this meaſure, and this meaſure alone, we are permitted to judge of him.—I will not, you ſee, be indebted to the facile apologiſt you mention, who admits the charge; but pleads in extenuation of the offence, that Shakeſpeare did not bring forward his female characters into a full and ſtriking light, "becauſe female players were in his time unknown." His defence muſt reſt upon critical principles: and if, "with thoſe embelliſhments which we expect in poetry, he has allotted to the females on his theatre, ſuch ſtations as are ſuitable to their ſituation in ſociety; and if he has delineated them with ſufficient diſcrimination, he has done all that we have any right to require." I will now endeavour to ſhew, that he has fulfilled both theſe conditions.

I. Diverſity

I. Diverſity of character depends a good deal on diverſity of ſituation: and ſituations are diverſified by variety of employment. We meet, for example, with leſs variety in the occupations of mankind in countries governed by deſpots, and unacquainted with trade and manufactures, than among nations that are free and commercial. The ſlaves of the deſpot diſplay no greater diverſity than depends upon the difference between poverty and riches: for their modes of education never affect the mind; they extend no farther than to ſuperinduce a varniſh of external urbanity; and confer ſome grace or pliancy in the management of the body. It would be a difficult enterprize, in a free country, to raiſe an illiterate and ignorant peaſant from the loweſt order to a diſtinguiſhed rank in the ſtate: but under ſome deſpotic governments, perſons with no other inſtruction than what regulates attitude, geſture, and ſome forms of external propriety, may be

be exalted even to gorgeous pre-eminence.—If ſituation influence the mind, and if uniformity of conduct be frequently occaſioned by uniformity of condition; there muſt be greater diverſity of male than of female characters. The employments of women, compared with thoſe of men, are few; their condition, and of courſe their manners, admit of leſs variety. The poet, therefore, whether epic or dramatic, who would exhibit his heroines in occupations that did not properly belong to them; or who endeavoured to diſtinguiſh them by a greater diverſity of habits, endowments, or diſpoſitions than their condition juſtified, would depart from the truth of nature; and, inſtead of meriting the praiſe of due decoration, would incur the blame of extravagant fiction. I ſay not that the abilities and diſpoſitions in both ſexes may not be equal or alike. There are few attainments in knowledge in which the pride of the male

ſex

ſex may not be alarmed, if ſuch alarm be decent, by the progreſs of fair competitors: and the hiſtory of modern Europe will atteſt, that even politics, a ſcience of which men are particularly jealous, is not without the reach of adventurous females*. Difference, however, of condition reſtrains the exertion of female genius; and muſt limit the diſplay both of talents and diſpoſitions.

Add to this, that the condition of women has been more reſtrained in ſome periods than in others. In times of great rudeneſs, the wives† and daughters of the fierce barbarian are domeſtic ſlaves. Even in civilized nations, if polygamy be permitted, and no reſtraint impoſed on the licentiouſneſs of divorce, the fair-ſex may

* The paths of criticiſm alſo (as muſt be well known to the lovers of Shakeſpeare, who cannot be unacquainted with Mrs. Montague's Eſſay) have been ſucceſsfully explored by female footſteps.

† Millar's Diſtinction of Ranks.

be

be loved, if the paſſions of thoſe who grant themſelves ſuch indulgence may be honoured with the appellation of love; but can never riſe to eſteem *. They may contribute to the amuſement or convenience, but can never be the companions of men. In all ſituations whatever, where the tendency to extreme profligacy becomes very flagrant, the reſpect due to the female virtues, and confidence in female affection, decline and decay. So great are the obligations of the fair-ſex to thoſe inſtitutions, which, more than any other, by limiting the freedom of divorce, and by other proper reſtrictions, have aſſerted the dignity of the female character! Poliſhed and even refined as were the manners of Athens and of Rome, the rank allowed to Athenian and Roman women was never ſo dignified, nor ſo ſuitable, in either of theſe republics, as among the nations of Chriſ-

* Και γαρ γυνη εστι χρηστη και δουλος. Καιτοι γε ισως τυτων, το μεν χειρον, &c. Ariſt. Poet.

 tendom—

tendom.—But as the ſubjects of dramatic poetry, and particularly of tragedy, are moſt commonly furniſhed by rude, remote, or antient ages, the poet muſt ſubmit to ſuch limitation, in his views of human life, as the manners of ſuch periods require. And if Shakeſpeare, like the great poets of antiquity, has not given his females ſo much to do, or diſplayed them as expreſſing all the violence of paſſion, or rendered them of ſo much importance in the conduct of dramatic events, as may have been done by his brethren of later times; he and the poets of antiquity have, in this inſtance at leaſt, given a more faithful, and not a leſs intereſting repreſentation of that nature which they choſe to diſplay.

II. I proceed ſtill farther, and venture to aſſert, that there is not only as much variety in Shakeſpeare's female characters as we have any title to demand; but that they are diſtinguiſhed with peculiar and

appropriated

appropriated features. Let ſome of them paſs in review before you. If you find in Miranda, Iſabella, Beatrice, and Portia, variety and diſcrimination enough, they may anſwer for their numerous ſiſterhood: nor need we, on the preſent occaſion, evoke the ſpirits of Queen Margaret or Dame Quickly, Juliet or Deſdemona.

1. In the character of Miranda, ſimplicity is intended to be the moſt ſtriking circumſtance. Conſiſtent, however, with ſimplicity, is gentleneſs of diſpoſition, flowing out in compaſſionate tenderneſs, and unreſtrained by ſuſpicion, Miranda, ſeeing the danger of ſhipwrecked ſtrangers, never ſuppoſes that they may be ſuffering puniſhment for heinous guilt, but expreſſes the moſt amiable commiſeration:

" If by your art, my deareſt father, you have
" Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them:
" O I have ſuffer'd
" With thoſe that I ſaw ſuffer."

Conſcious

Conſcious of no guile in herſelf, conſcious of native truth, ſhe believes that others are equally guileleſs, and repoſes confidence in their profeſſions. Her eaſy belief does not proceed from weakneſs; but from innate candour, and an ingenuous undiſmayed propenſity, which had never been abuſed or inſulted. If her ſimplicity and inexperience had rendered her ſhy and timid, the repreſentation might have been reckoned natural: but Shakeſpeare has exhibited a more delicate picture. Miranda, under the care of a wiſe and affectionate father, an utter ſtranger to the reſt of mankind, unacquainted with deceit either in others, or in herſelf, is more inclined to ingenuous confidence than to ſhy or reſerved ſuſpicion.—Moved in like manner by tender and ingenuous affection, ſhe never practiſes diſſimulation, never diſguiſes her intention, either in the view of heightening the love or of trying the veracity of the perſon whom ſhe prefers. All theſe particulars

are diſtinctly illuſtrated in the exquiſite love-ſcene between Ferdinand and Miranda.

" *Fer.* Admir'd Miranda,
" Indeed the top of admiration: worth
" What's deareſt to the world! &c.
" *Mir.* I do not know
" One of my ſex; no woman's face remember," &c.

Thus ſimple, apt to wonder, guileleſs, and becauſe guileleſs of eaſy belief, compaſſionate and tender, Miranda exhibits not only a conſiſtent, but a ſingular, and finely-diſtinguiſhed character.

2. Iſabella is repreſented equally blameleſs, amiable, and affectionate: ſhe is particularly diſtinguiſhed by intellectual ability. Her underſtanding and good-ſenſe are conſpicuous: her arguments are well-applied, and her pleading perſuaſive. Yet her abilities do not offend by appearing too maſculine: they are mitigated and finely blended with female ſoftneſs. If ſhe venture to argue, it is to ſave the life of a brother.

Even

Even then, it is with ſuch reluctance, heſitation, and diffidence, as need to be urged and encouraged.

" *Luc.* To him again, intreat him,
" Kneel down before him, &c.
" *Iſab.* O it is excellent
" To have a giant's ſtrength: but it is tyrannous
" To uſe it like a giant.
" *Luc.* That's well ſaid."

The tranſitions in Iſabella's pleadings are natural and affecting. Her introduction is timid and irreſolute.

Lucio tells her,

" If you ſhould need a pin,
" You could not with more lame a tongue deſire it.
" To him, I ſay."

Thus prompted, ſhe makes an effort; ſhe ſpeaks from her immediate feelings: ſhe has not acquired boldneſs enough to enter the liſts of argument; and addreſſes him merely as a ſuppliant:

" Not the king's crown nor the deputed ſword
" The marſhal's truncheon nor the judge's robe,
" Become them with one half ſo good a grace,
" As mercy does."

Animated by her exertion, ſhe becomes more aſſured, and ventures to refute objections. As ſhe is a nun, and conſequently acquainted with religious knowledge, the argument ſhe employs is ſuited to her profeſſion.

"*Iſ.* Why, all the ſouls that are, were forfeit once,
"And he that might the vantage beſt have took,
"Found out the remedy."

At length, no longer abaſhed and irreſolute, but fully collected, ſhe reaſons, ſo to ſay, on the merits of the cauſe.

"Good, good, my lord, bethink you
"Who is it that hath died for this offence?
"There's many have committed it."

Nor is her argument unbecoming in the mouth even of a nun. Her ſubſequent conduct vindicates her own character from aſperſion. Beſides, ſhe had with great delicacy and propriety, at the beginning of her pleading, expreſſed herſelf in ſuch a manner, as to obviate any charge.

"There

" There is a vice that I do moſt abhor,
" And moſt deſire ſhould meet the blow of juſtice,
" For which I would not plead but that I muſt."

Emboldened by truth, and the feeling of good intention, ſhe paſſes, at the end of her debate, from the merits of the cauſe, to a ſpirited appeal even to the conſciouſneſs of her judge.

" Go to your boſom,
" Knock there, and aſk your heart what it doth know
" Like to your brother's fault."

Iſabella is not only ſenſible and perſuaſive, but ſagacious, and capable of becoming addreſs. In communicating to her brother the unworthy deſigns of Angelo, ſhe ſeems aware of his weakneſs; ſhe is not raſh nor incautious, but gives her intimation by degrees, and with ſtudied dexterity.

It is not inconſiſtent with her gentleneſs, modeſty, and reſerve, that, endowed as ſhe is with underſtanding, and ſtrongly impreſſed with a ſenſe of duty, ſhe ſhould

form reſolutions reſpecting her own conduct without reluctance, and adhere to them without wavering. Though tenderly attached to her brother, ſhe ſpurns, without heſitation, the alternative propoſed by Angelo, and never balances in her choice.

Neither is it incongruous, but a fine tint in the character, that ſhe feels indignation, and expreſſes it ſtrongly. But it is not indignation againſt an adverſary; it is not on account of injury; it is a diſintereſted emotion: it is againſt a brother who does not reſpect himſelf; who expreſſes puſillanimous ſentiments; and would have her act in an unworthy manner.—Such is the amiable, pious, ſenſible, reſolute, determined, and eloquent Iſabella. She pleads powerfully for her brother; and no leſs powerfully for her poetical father.

3. But if the gentle, unſuſpecting, and artleſs ſimplicity of Miranda; if the good ſenſe and affecting eloquence of Iſabella, ſhould not induce you to acquit the poet, you

you will yield, perhaps, to the vivacity and wit of Beatrice.—No leſs amiable and affectionate than Miranda and Iſabella, ſhe expreſſes reſentment, becauſe ſhe feels commiſeration for the ſufferings of her friend. "Is he not approved in the height a vil-"lain, that hath ſlandered, ſcorned, and "diſhonoured my kinſwoman?" Like Iſabella, too, ſhe is diſtinguiſhed by intellectual ability; but of a different kind. She does not defend herſelf, or make her attacks with grave, argumentative, and perſuaſive elocution; but, endowed with the powers of wit, ſhe employs them in raillery, banter, and repartee. "*Ben.* "What, my dear Lady Diſdain! are you "yet living?—*Be.* Is it poſſible Diſdain "ſhould die, while ſhe hath ſuch meet food "to feed upon, as ſignor Benedict."—"The count is neither ſad, nor ſick, nor "merry, nor well; but civil count, civil "as a civil orange, and ſomething of that "jealous complexion."—Her ſmartneſs,

however, proceeds from wit rather than from humour. She does not attempt, or is not ſo ſucceſsful in ludicrous deſcription, as in lively ſayings. "*Bea.* My couſin "tells him in his ear, that he is in her "heart.—*Claud.* And ſo ſhe does, couſin. "—*Beat.* Good lord for alliance! thus goes "every one to the world, but I, and I am "ſun-burned; I may ſit in a corner, and "cry heigh-ho for a huſband.—*Pe.* Lady "Beatrice, I will get you one.—*Beat.* I "would rather have one of your father's "getting."

Another diſtinction, not unconnected with the preceding, is, that though lively, ſhe is nevertheleſs ſerious, and though witty, grave. Poſſeſſed of talents for wit, ſhe ſeems to employ them for the purpoſes of defence or diſguiſe. She conceals the real and thoughtful ſerioufneſs of her diſpoſition by a ſhew of vivacity. Howſoever ſhe may ſpeak of them, ſhe treats her own concerns, and thoſe of her friends, with

grave

grave conſideration. A compliment, and the enticement of a playful alluſion, almoſt betrays her into an actual confeſſion. "*Ped.* "In faith, lady, you have a merry heart. "—*Beat.* Yea, my lord, I thank it: poor "fool, it keeps on the windy ſide of care." She is deſirous of being reputed very ſprightly and diſdainful: but it is not of the qualities which we chiefly poſſeſs that we are uſually moſt oſtentatious. Congreve wiſhed to be thought a fine gentleman; Swift would be a politician; and Milton a divine. What Beatrice, who is really amiable, would have herſelf thought to be, appears in the following paſſage, where Hero, pretending not to know ſhe was preſent, deſcribes her in her own hearing.

"Nature never form'd a female heart
"Of prouder ſtuff than that of Beatrice.
"Diſdain and ſcorn ride ſparkling in her eyes,
"Miſprizing what they look on," &c.

Tender, affectionate, and ingenuous; yet conſcious

conſcious of more weakneſs than Miranda, or not like her educated in a deſert iſland, ſhe is aware of mankind, affects to be mirthful when ſhe is moſt in earneſt, and employs her wit when ſhe is moſt afraid. —Nor is ſuch diſſimulation, if it may be ſo termed, to be accounted peculiarly characteriſtical of female manners. It may be diſcovered in men of probity and tenderneſs, and who are actuated by ſerious principles; but who are rendered timid, either from ſome conſcious imbecility; or who become ſuſpicious by an early, too early an obſervation of deſigning perſons. If ſuch men are endowed with ſo much livelineſs of invention, as, in the ſociety to which they belong, to be reckoned witty or humorous, they often employ this talent as an engine of defence. Without it, they would perhaps fly from ſociety, like the melancholy Jacques, who wiſhed to have, but did not poſſeſs, a very diſtinguiſhed, though ſome, portion of ſuch ability.

Thus,

Thus, while they ſeem to annoy, they only wiſh to prevent: their mock encounter is a real combat: while they ſeem for ever in the field, they conceive themſelves always beſieged: though perfectly ſerious, they never appear in earneſt: and though they affect to ſet all men at defiance; and though they are not without underſtanding, yet they tremble for the cenſure, and are tortured with the ſneer of a fool. Let them come to the ſchool of Shakeſpeare. He will give *them*, as he gives many others, an uſeful leſſon. He will ſhew them an exemplary and natural reformation or exertion. Beatrice is not to be ridiculed out of an honorable purpoſe; nor to forfeit, for fear of a witleſs joke, a connection with a perſon who is "of a noble ſtrain, of "approved valour, and confirmed ho-"neſty."

4. Portia is a-kin both to Beatrice and Iſabella. She reſembles them both in gentleneſs of diſpoſition. Like Beatrice, ſhe

is

is ſpirited, lively, and witty. Her deſcription of ſome of her lovers, is an obvious illuſtration. "First, there is the Neapo-"litan prince," &c. Her vivacity, however, is not ſo brilliant, and approaches rather to ſportive ingenuity than to wit. Her ſituation renders her leſs grave, when in a ſerious mood, than Iſabella: but, like her, ſhe has intellectual endowment. She is obſervant, penetrating, and acute. Her addreſs is dexterous, and her apprehenſion extenſive. Though expoſed to circumſtances that might excite indignation, ſhe never betrays any violent emotion, or unbecoming expreſſion of anger. But Iſabella, on account of her religious ſeclusion, having had leſs intercourſe with the world, though of a graver, and apparently of a more ſedate diſpoſition, expreſſes her diſpleaſure with reproach; and inveighs with the holy wrath of a cloiſter. To the acquaintance which both of them have of theology, Portia ſuperadds ſome knowledge of law; and

diſplays

diſplays a dexterity of evaſion, along with an ingenuity in detecting a latent or unobſerved meaning, which do her no diſcredit as a barriſter. We may obſerve too, that the principal buſineſs in the Merchant of Venice is conducted by Portia. Nor is it foreign to remark, that as in the intimacy of Roſalind and Celia, Shakeſpeare has repreſented female friendſhip as no viſionary attainment; ſo he has, by the mouth of Portia, expreſſed ſome ſtriking particulars in the nature of that amiable connection.

" In companions
" That do converſe, and waſte the time together,
" Whoſe ſouls do bear an equal yoke of love,
" There muſt needs be a like proportion
" Of lineaments, of manners, and of ſpirit."

5. Our poet, in his Cordelia, has given us a fine example of exquiſite ſenſibility, governed by reaſon, and guided by a ſenſe of propriety. This amiable character, indeed, is conceived and executed with no leſs ſkill and invention than that of her father.

ther. Treated with rigour and injuſtice by Lear, ſhe utters no violent reſentment; but expreſſes becoming anxiety for reputation.

" I yet beſeech your majeſty,
" That you make known
" It is no vicious blot, murder, or foulneſs,
" No unchaſte action or diſhonor'd ſtep,
" That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favor."

She diſplays the ſame gentleneſs, accompanied with much delicacy of reproof, in her reply to a mercenary lover.

" Peace be with Burgundy!
" Since that reſpects of fortune are his love,
" I ſhall not be his wife."

Even to her ſiſters, though ſhe has perfect diſcernment of their characters, and though her misfortune was owing to their diſſimulation, ſhe ſhows nothing virulent nor unbecoming. She expreſſes, however, in a ſuitable manner, and with no improper irony, a ſenſe of their deceit, and apprehenſions of their diſaffection to Lear.

" Ye jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes
" Cordelia leaves you; I know what you are,
" And like a sister am most loth to call
" Your faults as they are nam'd."

Towards the close of the tragedy, when she receives complete information concerning the violent outrages committed against her father, the sufferings he has undergone, the ruin of his understanding, and has the fullest evidence of the guilt and atrocity of her sisters, she preserves the same consistency of character: notwithstanding her wrongs, she feels and is affected with the deepest sorrow for the misfortunes of Lear: she has the most entire abhorrence of the temper displayed by Goneril and Regan: yet her sorrows, her resentment, and indignation are guided by that sense of propriety, which does not in the smallest degree impair her tenderness and sensibility; but directs them to that conduct and demeanour, which are suitable, amiable, and interesting. Tenderness, affection, and sensibility, melting into grief, and mingled with sentiments

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of reluctant disapprobation, were never delineated with more delicacy than in the description of Cordelia, when she receives intelligence of her father's misfortunes.

"*Kent.* Did your letters pierce the queen? any demonstration of grief?

"*Gent.* I say she took 'em, read 'em in my presence;
"And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
"Her delicate cheek: it seem'd she was a queen
"Over her passion, which most rebel like
"Sought to be king over her."

"*Kent.* O then it moved her.

"*Gent.* But no rage. Patience and sorrow strove
"Which should express her goodliest: you have seen
"Sun-shine and rain at once. Those happiest smiles
"That played on her ripe lip seem'd not to know
"What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence,
"As pearls from diamonds dropt.—In brief,
"Sorrow would be a rarity most belov'd,
"If all could so become it."

"*Kent.* Made she no verbal question?

"*Gent.* Once or twice
"She heav'd the name of father
"Pantingly forth, as if it prest her heart,
"Cry'd, Sisters! Sisters! What? i'th' storm of night?
"Let pity ne'er believe it! then she shook

"The

"The holy water from her heav'nly eyes,
"And then retir'd to deal with grief alone."

Minds highly enlightened, contemplating the ſame object, both reaſon and are affected in a ſimilar manner. The tone of thought in the following paſſage, in 'The 'Theory of Moral Sentiments,' accords perfectly with Shakeſpeare's account of Cordelia. 'What noble propriety and grace do we feel in the conduct of thoſe who, in their own caſe, exert that recollection and ſelf-command which conſtitute the dignity of every paſſion, and which bring it down to what others can enter into? We are diſguſted with that clamorous grief, which, without any delicacy, calls upon our compaſſion with ſighs and importunate lamentations. But we reverence that reſerved, that ſilent and majeſtic ſorrow, which diſcovers itſelf only in the ſwelling of the eyes, in the quivering of the lips and cheeks, and in the diſtant but affecting coldneſs of the whole beha-

viour. It impoſes the like ſilence upon us. We regard it with reſpectful attention, and watch with anxious concern over our whole behaviour, leſt by any impropriety we ſhould diſturb that concerted tranquillity, which it requires ſo great an effort to ſupport.'—Cordelia, full of affection, feels for the diſtreſs of her father: her ſenſe of propriety impoſes reſtraint on her expreſſions of ſorrow: the conflict is painful: full of ſenſibility, and of a delicate ſtructure; the conflict is more than ſhe can endure; ſhe muſt indulge her emotions: her ſenſe of propriety again interpoſes; ſhe muſt vent them in ſecret, and not with loud lamentation.

" She ſhakes
" The holy water from her heavenly eyes,
" And then retires to deal with grief alone."

There are few inſtances in any poet, where the influences of contending emotions are ſo nicely balanced and diſtinguiſhed; for while in this amiable picture we diſcern the corrected ſeverity of that

that behaviour which a ſenſe of propriety dictates, mitigated and brought down by fine ſenſibility, and the ſoftneſs of the female character; we alſo ſee this ſoftneſs upheld, and this ſenſibility rendered ſtill more engaging, by the influences of a ſenſe of propriety.

Need I add to theſe illuſtrations, the ſiſterly and filial affections of Ophelia, leading her to ſuch deference for a father, as to practiſe deceit at his ſuggeſtion on a generous lover, and ſtrive to entangle him in the toils of political cunning? Need I add the pride, the violence, the abilities, and the diſappointed ambition of Margaret? Need I add Dame Quickly and Lady Anne?—If, notwithſtanding all theſe, you perſiſt in ſaying that Shakeſpeare has produced no eminent female characters, becauſe, in the words of the poet whom you quote 'moſt women have no character at all;' you muſt mean in the ſpirit or manner of the ſatiriſt, and with an eye to the perſonage laſt-mentioned, to pun rather than to refute.

But you tell me—"the gentle Deſdemona is like the gentle Cordelia; the tender Imogen like the tender Juliet; the ſenſible Iſabella like the ſenſible Portia; the violent Margaret like the violent Conſtance; and the cruel Regan like the cruel Goneril: in ſhort, that they are all copies of one another; that any differences appearing between them are occaſioned by difference of external circumſtances; that Portia, in Iſabella's ſituation, would have been another Iſabella: and ſo with the reſt."—If this be urged as an objection, it cannot be admitted. Deſdemona, in the ſame ſituation with Margaret, would not have inveighed, nor vented imprecation. Cordelia was ſituated in the ſame circumſtances with Regan, but performed a very different part. Notwithſtanding the ſimilarity in the inſtances above-mentioned, there is ſtill ſo much diverſity as to obviate the objection.—Still further, if you reaſon in this manner, allow me to ſay, in the words of the

the poet, you reaſon "too curiouſly:" and would reduce the ſum of dramatic characters, how different ſoever their names and fortunes, to an inconſiderable number. Does it not ſtrike you, too, that to diſregard ſuch diſcrimination as proceeds from external condition, is contrary to the truth of nature, and the juſtice of impartial criticiſm? Many perſons may have received from nature ſimilar talents and diſpoſitions; but being differently placed in ſociety, they exert the ſame power, or gratify the ſame deſire, with different degrees of force, and different modes of indulgence. Their characters are therefore different, and if ſo in reality, ſo alſo in imitation. Similarity of original ſtructure does not conſtitute ſimilarity or ſameneſs of character, unleſs that ſimilarity appear in the ſame circumſtances, in the ſame manner, and with equal force. I ſtill therefore adhere to my former opinion: and have not ventured, I hope, in vain to aſſert the merits of Shakeſpeare's females.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CHIEF OBJECTS OF CRITICISM

IN THE WORKS OF

SHAKESPEARE.

NO poetical writer among the moderns has afforded more employment to critics and commentators than Shakeſpeare. As he wrote while the manners, no leſs than the language, of his countrymen, were very different from what they are at preſent; and as he is reported to have been very careleſs about the fate of his performances after they were given to the public, he is become in many inſtances difficult, and almoſt unintelligible. Hence ſeveral learned and diſcerning

diſcerning editors have rendered eſſential ſervice to the literature of their country, by explaining his obſolete phraſes, by freeing his text from ſpurious paſſages, and by elucidating his frequent alluſions to obſcure or antiquated cuſtoms. Labours of this ſort are ſo much the more valuable, as Shakeſpeare is juſtly accounted the great poet of human nature. Even to moraliſts and philoſophers, his diſplay and illuſtration of paſſions and manners, may afford not only amuſement, but inſtruction.

"The operations of the mind," as has been well obſerved by an anonymous writer, in his remarks on ſome of the preceding eſſays, "are more complex "than thoſe of the body: its motions are "progreſſive: its tranſitions abrupt and "inſtantaneous: its attitudes uncertain "and momentary. The paſſions purſue "their courſe with celerity; their direc-"tion may be changed, or their impetu-

"ofity modified by a number of cauſes "which are far from being obvious, and "which frequently eſcape our obſerva- "tion. It would therefore be of great "importance to philoſophical ſcrutiny, if "the poſition of the mind, in any given "circumſtances, could be fixed till it was "deliberately ſurveyed; if the cauſes "which alter its feelings and operations "could be accurately ſhewn, and their "effects aſcertained with preciſion." To accompliſh theſe ends, the dramatic writers, and particularly Shakeſpeare, may be of the greateſt uſe. An attempt has accordingly been made, in the preceding diſcourſes, to employ the light which he affords us in illuſtrating ſome curious and intereſting views of human nature.

In Macbeth, miſled by an overgrown and gradually perverted paſſion, "we "trace the progreſs of that corruption, "by which the virtues of the mind are "made to contribute to the completion

"of its depravity." In Hamlet we have a ſtriking repreſentation of the pain, of the dejection, and contention of ſpirit, produced in a perſon, not only of exquiſite, but of moral and correct ſenſibility, by the conviction of extreme enormity of conduct in thoſe whom he loves, or wiſhes to love and eſteem. We obſerve in Jacques, how

"Goodneſs wounds itſelf,
"And ſweet affection proves the ſpring of woe."

We ſee in Imogen, that perſons of real mildneſs and gentleneſs of diſpoſition, fearing or ſuffering evil, by the ingratitude or inconſtancy of thoſe on whoſe affections they had reaſon to depend, are more ſolicitous than jealous; expreſs regret rather than reſentment; and are more apt to be overwhelmed with ſorrow than inflamed with revenge. In contemplating the character of Richard the Third, we ſee, and are enabled to explain, the effect produced upon the mind by the diſplay

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of great intellectual ability, employed for inhuman and perfidious purpoſes. We are led, on the other hand, by an obvious connection, to obſerve, in the character of Falſtaff, the effect produced on the mind by the diſplay of conſiderable ability, directed by ſenſual appetites and mean deſires. King Lear illuſtrates, that mere ſenſibility, uninfluenced by a ſenſe of propriety, leads men to an extravagant expreſſion both of ſocial and unſocial feelings; renders them capriciouſly inconſtant in their affections; variable, and of courſe irreſolute, in their conduct. In Timon of Athens, we have an excellent illuſtration of ſelf-deceit, diſplayed in the conſequences of that inconſiderate profuſion which aſſumes the appearance of liberality, and is ſuppoſed, even by the inconſiderate perſon himſelf, to proceed from a generous principle; but which, in reality, has its chief origin in the love of diſtinction.

But

But while Shakeſpeare furniſhes excellent illuſtrations of many paſſions and affections, and of many ſingular combinations of paſſion, affection, and ability, in various characters, we perceive, in the juſtneſs of his imitation, the felicity of his invention. While he 'holds up a 'mirror,' in which we recognize the features and complexions of many powers and principles in the human mind, we muſt admire that fine poliſh by which they are received and reflected. He may be irregular in the ſtructure of his fable, incorrect in his geographical or hiſtorical knowledge, and too cloſe an imitator of nature in his mixture of ſerious and ludicrous incidents; for theſe are his principal errors: but in the faithful diſplay of character, he has not hitherto been ſurpaſſed. Nor can the careleſſneſs imputed to him in ſome other reſpects, be charged upon him, without injuſtice, in his portraits of human life.

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The true method of eſtimating his merit in this particular, is by ſuch an examination as in the preceding diſcourſes has been ſuggeſted, and in ſome meaſure attempted. General remarks are often vague; and, to perſons of diſcernment, afford ſmall ſatisfaction. But if we conſider the ſentiments and actions, attributed by the poet to his various characters, as ſo many facts; if we obſerve their agreement or diſagreement, their aim, or their origin; and if we claſs them according to their common qualities, or connect them by their original principles, we ſhall aſcertain, with ſome accuracy, the truth of the repreſentation. For, without having our judgments founded in this manner, they are liable to change, error, and inconſiſtency. Thus the moraliſt becomes a critic: and the two ſciences of ethics and criticiſm appear to be intimately and very naturally connected. In truth, no one who is unacquainted with

with the human mind, or entertains improper notions of human conduct, can diſcern excellence in the higher ſpecies of poetical compoſition.

It may be ſaid however, in a ſuperficial or careleſs manner, 'that in matters of this kind, laborious diſquiſition is unneceſſary: and that we can perceive or feel at once, whether delineations of character be well or ill executed.'—Perſons, indeed, of ſuch catholic and intuitive taſte, require no erudition. Conſcious of their high illumination, they will ſcorn reſearch, and reject enquiry. Yet many of thoſe who find amuſement in fine writing, cannot boaſt of ſuch exquiſite and peculiar endowments. As they need ſome inſtruction before they can determine concerning the merit of thoſe delineations that imitate external objects; ſo they need no inconſiderable inſtruction before they will truſt to their own impreſſions concerning the diſplay of the human mind.

mind. Now, if criticiſm be uſeful in forming, or in rectifying our taſte for what is excellent in language, imagery, and arrangement of parts, it is ſurely no leſs uſeful in regulating our judgment concerning the imitation of human powers and propenſities. Or is it an eaſier matter to determine whether an affection of the mind be called forth on a fit occaſion, expreſſed with no unſuitable ardor, and combined with proper adjuncts; than to judge concerning the aptneſs of a compariſon, or the ſymmetry of a ſentence? Yet, in the preſent ſtate of literary improvement, none, without being conſcious of having cultivated their powers of taſte, will decide with aſſurance concerning the beauties either of imagery or of language: and none, whoſe range of obſervation has been extenſive, will pronounce the knowledge of human nature, of the paſſions and feelings of the heart, a matter of much eaſier attainment. If

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the diſplay of character require the higheſt exertion of poetical talents, that ſpecies of criticiſm which leads us to judge concerning the poet's conduct in ſo arduous an enterprize, is not inferior, or unimportant.

Add to this, that the differences of opinion concerning ſome of Shakeſpeare's moſt diſtinguiſhed characters, which the author of theſe imperfect eſſays has had occaſion to remark, ſince they were firſt offered to an indulgent public, are ſufficient to ſatisfy him, that ſuch diſquiſitions may not only be amuſing, but have a direct tendency to eſtabliſh, on a ſolid foundation, the principles of ſound criticiſm. Any thing further on this ſubject would be ſuperfluous. Thoſe who have a true reliſh for genuine and agreeable imitations of human nature, and whoſe judgments are not miſled by prejudice, even though they ſhould receive immediate enjoyment from the delinea-

tions they contemplate, and be inſtantaneouſly inclined to pronounce them juſt; will receive additional ſatisfaction, if, by the diſpaſſionate award of reaſon, their feelings are juſtified, and their prepoſſeſſions confirmed.

FINIS.